1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
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CHAPTER II

OECOLOGY

I

FROM a European's point of view Nuerland has no favourable qualities, unless its severity be counted as such, for its endless marshes and wide savannah plains have an austere, monotonous charm. It is throughout hard on man and beast, being for most of the year either parched or a swamp. But Nuer think that they live in the finest country on earth and, it must be admitted, for herdsmen their country has many admirable features. I soon gave up trying to convince Nuer that there is any country more suited for cattle husbandry than their own, an attempt rendered more useless since a few of them have been taken to Khartoum, which they consider to be the home of all white men, and, having seen the desert scrub of that latitude, have been confirmed in their opinion that their land is superior to ours.

The grasses necessary for the welfare of the herds depend for existence on suitable conditions of soil and water. The soils of Nuerland are heavy clays, broken by the sun into deep cracks in the drought and sodden in the rains. They hold up water and consequently enable certain species of grasses to survive the dry months and provide pasture for the cattle. Nuer and their cattle would not, however, be able to live if it were not that there are more sandy elevated spots on which they can take refuge in flood-time and where they can practise horticulture.

Surface water comes partly from rainfall and partly from the flooding of the rivers which traverse Nuerland and is more than adequate to make grass. In an average year the rains commence in April, when a few showers fall and the sky is overclouded, but it is not till the end of May that they set in with a will. At their maximum, in July and August, the weather is cool, even cold in the mornings and evenings, the sun is overcast during most of the day, and a south-westerly wind prevails. Showers become lighter and less frequent in October and usually have ceased altogether by the middle of November when the north wind begins to blow. It blows consistently down the valley of the Nile

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ECONOMIC LIFE OF THE NUER : CATTLE.

By E. E. Evans Pritchard.

II.

621 The chief characteristices of Nuer social life can be understood only when their pastoral activities are viewed in relation to the country in which they live. Social instutitions are to a large extent a function of this dynamic relationship between mode of livelihood and environment. I have said something about cattle and the esteem in which Nuer hold them. I will now say something about the country in which these cattle have to be maintained.

186 133 From the European's point of view Nuerland has no favourable qualities, unless its severity be counted such, for its endless marshes and wide savannah plains have an austere monotonous charm. It is throughout hard on man and beast, being for most of the year either a swamp or a parched and waterless tract. Trekking across the Nuer plains is a great weariness to body and spirit. But Nuer do not share this opinion. They think that they live in the finest country on earth, envying no people their heritage, and, it must be admitted, for herdsmen their country has many admirable features. It provides pasturage all the year round and absence of forest prevents the encroachment of tsetse. I have long since given up trying to convince Nuer that there is any country more suited for cattle husbandry than their own, an attempt more useless since a few Nuer have been taken to Khartoum, a place they consider to be the home of all white men. Having seen the desert scrub which surrounds Khartoum they are confirmed in their opinion that their own land is superior to ours.

•134 The grasses upon which depends the welfare of the herds depend, for existence in their turn, on soil and water. The soils of Nuerland are heavy clays which look very much alike to me and which are equally unpleasant to walk on in the dry season, when they are broken by the sun into deep cracks, and in the wet season when they form

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sticky water-laden mud. The clayey plains are broken by occasional sandy ridges and knolls upon which the débris of years of occupation has accumulated. However, Nuer distinguish between the black soil, of such areas as Eastern Jikany country, which they call *mun mi car* or *dok* and the more sandy soil, which is found, for example, in parts of Lou country, and which they call *mun lita*. The black heavy clays are more suitable for cultivation of millet because they hold up rain water, but they are bad for cattle which in the rains have to struggle through the sticky mud and to eat the high coarse grasses which such soil nurtures rather than the sweeter short grasses which prevail on more sandy soils. Thus the Lou people say in favour of their country "Our cattle do not come back each day from grazing caked in mud but they return with clean hooves." On the other hand the more sandy parts of Lou country, *e.g.*, near Muot Dit, do not hold up rain water which makes cultivation of millet difficult so that even a slight drought destroys the young plants, and often makes it necessary for the people to wander early and far from their villages in the dry season to obtain sufficient pasturage. There are no salt-licks in Nuerland.

Surface water comes partly from direct rainfall over Nuerland and partly from the flooding of the principal rivers which traverse it and which derive most of their water from rainfall elsewhere. In an average year the rains commence in April and continue till the end of October. Towards the middle or end of April a few showers come down and the sky is overclouded. It is not till the end of May that the rains set in with a will. July and August are the months with heaviest rainfall and the weather is cool, even cold in the mornings and evenings and a south-westerly wind prevails. The sun is overcast during most of the day. Showers become lighter and less frequent in October and by the middle of November have ceased altogether. In November the north wind begins to blow and it blows consistently down the valley of the Nile from the Mediterranean to the Plateau of the Great Lakes till the approach of the next rains. The weather becomes warmer and warmer and from January till March is a great trial to Europeans.